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ABSTRACT

One of a series of studies on corporal punishment of children, this paper argues that the reasons provided for the strong support of spanking are myths. Ten myths about spanking children are discussed by offering arguments that support the action and by quoting findings from studies that refute the arguments. The ten myths are: (1) spanking works better than other methods; (2) spanking is needed as a last resort; (3) spanking is harmless; (4) one or two instances will not cause damage; (5) parents cannot stop unless they get training in alternatives; (6) without spanking, children will be spoiled or run wild; (7) parents do it only rarely or only for serious problems; (8) parents stop spanking by the time a child is a teenager; (9) if parents do not spank, they will verbally abuse a child; and (10) it is unrealistic to expect parents never to spank. The paper notes that while some of these myths are about the effectiveness of spanking, others are about the harmlessness of spanking. The paper then suggests some of the reasons for the persistence of these two types of myths. The central reason for the first type of myth is "selective inattention," whereby people do not pay attention to or remember the times when spanking fails to work because doing so contradicts what they believe to be true. That is, people have a vested interest in believing that their parents were correct. This, in turn, raises the question why most Americans defend spanking, and several reasons are offered for it. The two important reasons for the second type of myth are that the harmful effects do not become visible right away and that only a small percentage of spanked children experience obviously harmful effects. The paper concludes by noting that although the principle of respect for minority rights and family privacy conflict with the principle that it is wrong to treat children in ways that might threaten their physical and mental health, there is enough evidence to seek an accommodation between our commitment to individual freedom and our commitment to the well-being of children and of society. Contains 30 references. (BAC)

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TEN MYTHS ABOUT SPANKING CHILDREN

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This paper is one of a series of studies of corporal punishment of children conducted at the Family Research Laboratory, University of New Hampshire. A list of publications on corporal punishment is available on request. The research is supported by NIMH grant T32 MH15161 and by the University of New Hampshire. I would like to thank Carrie Yodanis for her exceptional skill in work on the statistical analysis and for her valuable comments on an earlier draft. The paper also benefitted from comments and suggestions by members of the 1992 Family Violence Research Seminar.

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The laws of every state of the United States permit parents to hit children for purposes of correction or control. Eighty four percent of a national sample of Americans agreed with the statement that "It is sometimes necessary to give a child a good hard spanking." Study after study shows that almost 100% of parents of toddlers use spanking and other kinds of "corporal punishment" or "physical punishment." There are many reasons for the strong support of spanking, but most of them are myths.

Most parents use the word "spanking" for more than just hitting the child on the buttocks. They use it to refer to all hitting of a child, such as slapping the hand of a child who touches something forbidden, or slapping the face of a child who talks back or calls the parent a name. I will also use it in that more general sense, except where it really does not fit. For example, teens are often slapped, but they are rarely spanked on the buttocks, so when talking about teenagers I will refer to it as corporal punishment or as hitting.

Myth 1

SPANKING WORKS BETTER THAN OTHER METHODS

There has been a huge amount of research on the effectiveness of corporal punishment <u>of animals</u>, but remarkably little on the effectiveness of spanking <u>children</u>. That may be because almost everyone assumes that spanking is effective and therefore they don't feel a need to study it. In fact, what little research there is on children agrees with the research on animals in finding that spanking is <u>not</u> more effective than other modes of correcting misbehavior, and there are some studies that show it is less effective.

Ellen Cohn and I studied 270 students at two New England colleges. We asked them to tell us about the year they experienced the most corporal punishment. Their average age that year was eight, and they recalled having been hit an average of six times that year. Next we asked them about the percent of the time that the corporal punishment was effective. It averaged just over half of the times (53%), which also means that corporal punishment was not effective almost half the time it was used.

Day and Roberts (1983) did an experiment on three year old children given "time out." Half of the mothers were assigned to use spanking as the mode of correction if the child did not comply with "time out" and left the time out place (sitting in a corner). The other half put the child who did not comply behind a low plywood barrier and physically enforced the child staying there. Keeping the child in the barrier area was just as effective as the spanking in correcting the misbehavior that led to the time out. A longitudinal study by Larzelere (in press) also found that a combination of <u>non</u>corporal punishment and reasoning was as effects as corporal punishment and reasoning in correcting disobedience.

Crozier and Katz (1979), Patterson (1982) and Webster Stratton et al. (1988, 1990) all studied children with serious conduct problems. Part of the treatment

used in all three experiments was to get parents to stop spanking. In all three, the behavior of the children improved after spanking ended. Of course, many other things were part of the intervention in addition to avoiding spanking. But, as will be shown below, parents who on their own accord do not spank, also do lots of other things. It is these "other things," such as clear standards for what is expected, lots of love and affection, explaining things to the child, and recognizing and rewarding good behavior, that account for why children of parents who do not spank tend to be easy to manage and well behaved. What about parents who do these things and also spank? Those children also tend to be well behaved, but it is illogical to attribute that to the spanking since the same or better results are achieved without the spanking, and also without the adverse side effects described below.

Such experiments are extremely important and more experiments are needed to really understand what is going on when parents spank. However, results like those of Day and Roberts can be observed in almost any household. Lets take two examples.

In a typical American family there are many instances when a parent says "Mary! You did that again! I am going to have to send you to your room again." This would be one of many examples of a non-spanking method that did <u>not</u> work.

The second example is similar: A parent says something like "Mary! You did that again! I'm going to have to spank you again." This would be one of many examples of <u>spanking</u> that did not work.

The difference between these two examples is that when spanking does not work parents tend to forget it because it contradicts the almost universal American belief that spanking is something that works when all else fails. Conversely, they tend to remember when a <u>non</u>-spanking method did not work. The reality is that nothing works all the time with a toddler.

Parents who favor spanking can turn this around and ask "If spanking doesn't work any better, isn't that the same as saying that it works just as well? So what is wrong with a quick slap on the wrist or bottom?" There are at least three things that are wrong:

* Spanking becomes less and less effective over time, and eventually becomes physically impossible

* For some children, the lessons learned through spanking include the idea that they only need to be good if mommy or daddy is watching or will know about it

* There are a number of very harmful side effects -- for example, a higher probability that the child will grow up to be depressed or violent. Parents can't perceive these side effects because they only show up in the long run.

Myth 2

SPANKING IS NEEDED AS A LAST RESORT

Even parents and social scientists who are opposed to spanking tend to think that it may be needed when all else fails. There is no scientific evidence supporting this belief. It is a myth that grows out of our cultural and psychological commitment to corporal punishment. You can prove this to yourself by a simple exercise with two other people. Each of the three should, in turn, think of the most extreme situation where spanking is necessary. The other two should try to think of alternatives. It is very difficult to come up with a situation for which the alternatives were not as good, and usually better, than spanking.

Take the example of a child running out into the street. Almost everyone thinks that spanking is appropriate because of the extreme danger. Although spanking in that situation may help parents to relieve their own tension and anxiety, it is not necessary or appropriate for teaching the child. It is not necessary because, spanking does not work better than other methods, and it is not appropriate because of the harmful side effects of spanking. The only physical force needed is to grab the child and get him/her out of danger.

Ironically, if spanking is to be done at all, the "last resort" may be the worst time. The problem is that parents are usually very angry by that time and act impulsively. Because of the high anger, if the child rebels and calls the parent a name or kicks the parent, the episode can escalate into physical abuse. Indeed, most episodes of physical abuse started as physical punishment and got out of hand (Kadushin and Martin, 1981). Of course, the reverse is not true, i.e., most instances of spanking do not escalate into abuse. Still, the danger is there.

The second problem with spanking as a last resort is that, in addition to teaching that hitting is the way to correct wrongs, doing so impulsively teaches another wrong lesson -- namely that being extremely angry and "beyond yourself" justifies hitting.

Myth 3

SPANKING IS HARMLESS: I WAS SPANKED AND I'M OK

When someone says "I was spanked and I'm ok," they are arguing that spanking is not harmful. This is contrary to almost all the available research. One reason the harmful effects are ignored is because most of the harmful effects do not become visible right away, often not for years. Even more important is the fact that only a relatively small percentage of spanked children experience obviously harmful effects.

The delayed reaction and the small proportion seriously hurt are the same reasons why the harmful effects of smoking were not perceived for centuries. In the case of smoking, the research shows that a third of very heavy smokers die of lung cancer or some other smoking induced disease. That, of course, means

that two thirds of heavy smokers do not die of these diseases (Mattson et al., 1987). So most heavy smokers can say "I've smoked more than a pack-a-day for thirty years and I'm ok." Similarly, most people who were spanked can say "My parents spanked me, and I'm not a wife beater or depressed.

Another argument in defense of spanking is that it is not harmful if the parents are loving and explain why they are spanking. The research does show that the harmful effects of spanking are reduced if it occurs in a context of a loving family in which parents explain their actions. However, although the harmful effects are reduced, a study by Larzelere (1986) and my own research (Straus and Gimpel, 1992) show that they are not eliminated. Let us look at three of the harmful side effects of spanking.

Aggression

Even in a loving context, and perhaps even more in such a context, spanking teaches that hitting others is morally correct. Of course, it is only correct if the other person is doing something seriously wrong and won't stop. The irony of this can be seen by examining the circumstances under which a child hits another child. It is very rare for a child to simply walk up to another child and hit him or her. Rather, children hit other children when the other child is doing something that they think is seriously wrong -- such as "squirting water on me" and refusing to stop, or "taking my doll" and not giving it back. So it is no wonder that hitting a child for misbehavior increases the probability the child will hit siblings and other children (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, 1980). They are faithfully following the rules learned from the example of their parents' behavior. When the child grows up, spanked children tend to spank their own children, which is hardly surprising. What may be surprising is Figure 1 (from Straus, 1991). It shows that they also have a higher rate of hitting their spouse. However, it should not be surprising because spouses may also "misbehave" and "not listen to reason." Other findings from the same study show that the more a child is spanked, the greater the probability that he or she will assault someone outside their family.

(Figure 1 about here)

Difficult To Control Children

One of the most important side effects is that corporal punishment makes it more difficult for parents to influence a child later on, especially in adolescence. This is partly because in adolescence, children become too big to control by physical force, but also because each use of spanking chips away at the bond between parent and child and children are more likely to do what the parents want if there is a strong bond of affection with the parents (Hirschi, 1969).

Ellen Cohn and I asked the 270 students mentioned earlier to tell us about their reactions to "the first time you can remember being hit by one of your parents" and the most recent instance. We used a check list of 33 items, one of which was "hated him or her." That item was checked by 42% for the first instance of corporal punishment they could remember and by the same percentage

for the most recent incident. The large percent who hated their parents for hitting them is important because it is evidence that use of corporal punishment does chip away at the bond between child and parent.

Contrary to the "spoiled child" myth (see below), children of non-spanking parents tend to control their behavior on the basis of what is right and wrong rather than to avoid being hit. This means that if parents avoid spanking, they are likely to have children who are easier to manage and better behaved (see Figure 4, from Sears et al., 1957). That is ironic because almost everyone thinks that the opposite is the case.

Depression, Alienation, And Achievement

Research on the women and men in the National Family Violence Surveys finds that the more corporal punishment experienced, the greater the probability of being depressed and the greater the probability of having thought about committing suicide (Straus, 1993) during the 12 months preceding the interview. Another analysis found that the more corporal punishment experienced, the greater the alienation; and, holding constant social class of origin, the lower the occupational and economic achievement (Straus and Gimpel, 1992). I interpret the lowered occupational and economic achievement as one of the consequences of the higher rate of depression and alienation associated with corporal punishment.

Myth 4

ONE OR TWO INSTANCES ARE NOT GOING TO CAUSE ANY DAMAGE.

(Figure 2 about here)

The evidence does indeed indicate that the greatest risk of harmful effects occurs when spanking is very frequent. However, that does not necessarily mean that just once or twice is harmless. Unfortunately, the hypothesis that even once or twice increases the probability of psychological damage is not addressed by most of the available research. This is because the studies seem to be based on this myth. They group children into "low" and "high" frequency of having been hit, thus preventing the "once or twice is harmless" myth from being tested scientifically because the "low" group may include parents who spank as often as once a month. However, the few studies that did classify children according to the number of times they experienced corporal punishment, are illustrated by Figure 2 (from Straus, 1992). Both show that even one or two instances are associated with a higher number of depressive symptoms later in life, although only slightly more. The increase in harmful side effects such as depression may be small, but there is no need to run even that small risk because of the evidence that corporal punishment is no more effective than other forms of discipline in the short run, and is less effective in the long run.

Myth 5

PARENTS CAN'T STOP UNLESS THEY GET TRAINING IN ALTERNATIVES

Although everyone can use additional skills in child management, there is absolutely no evidence showing that it takes some extraordinary training to be able to stop spanking. The most basic step in eliminating corporal punishment is for parent educators, psychologists, and pediatricians, to make a simple and unambiguous statement that hitting a child is wrong and that a child should never be hit. That is, just as we tell children to never hit another child, parents need to be told to never hit their own child -- never, ever, under any circumstances.

Almost without exception that idea has been rejected. Parent educators and social scientists I have talked to argue that it would turn off parents and it could be harmful because parent don't know what else to do. They say that parents need to learn alternative modes of discipline before we can withdraw use of spanking. That may be true for some incompetent parents and, as I said, all parents can benefit from more skills in child management. So parent eduction programs such as The Nurturing Program (Bavolek, 1983 to 1992), STEP (Dinkmeyer and McKay, 1989), Parent Effectiveness Training (Gordon, 1975), Effective Black Parenting (Alvy, and Marigna, 1987), and Los Ninos Bien Educado Program (Tannatt and Alvy, 1989) can help everyone. However, even without such programs, most parents already use a wide range of non-spanking methods, such as explaining, reasoning, and rewarding. The problem is that they also spank. Given the fact that parents already know and use many methods of teaching and controlling, the solution is amazingly simple. In most cases, parents can do just what they were doing to correct the misbehavior, but leave out the spanking!

This can be illustrated by again using the situation that almost everyone thinks requires spanking: a toddler that runs out into the street. In that situation, a typical parent will scream in terror, rush out and grab the child, and run to safety telling the child "No! No!" and explaining the danger -- all of this accompanied by one or more slaps to the legs or behind.

The same sequence is as effective or more effective without the spanking. The spanking part is not needed because even tiny children can sense the terror in the parent and do understand "No! No!" Just-born infants can tell the difference between when a mother is anxious and when she is tense (Stern, 1977). Nevertheless, the fact that a child understands that something is wrong does not guarantee never again running into the street; just as spanking does not guarantee the child will not run into the street again.

If the child runs out again parents who don't spank should do what parents who spank do. They spank again -- as many times as necessary until the child learns. In the meantime, they monitor the child, hold the child's hand, and take whatever other means are needed to protect the child. Just as parents who spank have to be ready to repeat the process until the child learns, the same applies to parents who omit the spanking. The difference is that when non-spanking methods do not work, parents tend to quickly turn to spanking because they believe it is more effective; whereas when spanking does not work, parents do not question its effectiveness. They keep on spanking until it does work.

Of course, most parents who spank do more than just repeat the spanking or spank harder. They usually also do things such as explain the danger to the child before letting the child go out again, warn the child that if it happens again, they will have to stay in the house for the afternoon, etc. The irony is that when the child finally does learn, they attribute the success to the spanking part of what they have done!

Myth 6

IF YOU CAN'T SPANK, CHILDREN WILL BE SPOILED, RUN WILD, ETC.

It is true that some non-spanked children turn out to be problems, but when this happens it is not because the parent didn't spank. It is because some parents think that the alternative to spanking is to ignore a child's misbehavior, or to replace spanking with verbal attacks such as "Only a dummy like you can't learn to keep your toys where I won't trip over them." The real alternative is to take firm action to correct the misbehavior, but not by spanking. Just firmly condemning what the child has done and explaining why it is wrong is usually enough.

Suppose the child hits another child. Parents need to express outrage at this or the child may think it is acceptable behavior. The expression of outrage and a clear statement about never hitting another person will do the trick in most cases. That does not mean one such admonition will do the trick, any more than a single spanking will do the trick. It takes most children a while to learn such things, whatever the methods the parents use.

(Figure 3 about here)

The importance of how parents go about teaching children is clear from the classic study of American parenting, Patterns of Child Rearing (Sears, Maccoby, and Levin, 1957). This study found two actions by parents that are linked to a high level of aggression by the child: Permissiveness of the child's aggression, i.e. ignoring it when the child hits another child, and spanking to correct misbehavior. The most aggressive children in Figure 3 are those at the upper right. They are children of parents who permitted aggression by the child and who also spanked. The least aggressive children are at the lower left. They are children of parents whose parents clearly condemned acts of aggression, and who by not spanking, acted in a way that exemplified the principle that hitting is wrong.

(Figure 4 about here)

There are other reasons why, on the average, the children of parents who do not spank are better behaved than children of parents who spank. Non-spanking parents tend to:

* Pay more attention to their children's behavior, both good and bad, than do parents who spank. Consequently they are more likely to reward good behavior and less likely to ignore misbehavior

* Do more explaining and reasoning. This teaches the child how to use these essential tools to monitor their own behavior, whereas children who are spanked get less training in thinking things through

* Treat the child in ways that tend to bond the child to them and avoid acts that weaken the bond, including

  More rewarding of good behavior
  Greater warmth and affection
  Less verbal assaults on the child (see Myth 9)
  By not spanking, they avoid anger and resentment over spanking

  When there is a strong bond, children identify with the parent and want to avoid doing things the parent says are wrong. This amounts to the child developing a conscience and letting that direct his/her behavior. That is exactly what Sears et al. found (see Figure 4).

Myth 7

PARENTS DO IT ONLY RARELY OR ONLY FOR SERIOUS PROBLEMS

Contrary to this myth, parents who spank tend to use this method of discipline for almost any misbehavior. Many do not even give the child a warning. They spank before trying other things. And some advocates of spanking recommend this. At any supermarket or other public place, one can see examples of a child doing something wrong, such as taking a can of food off the shelf. The parent then slaps the child's hand and puts the can back, sometimes without saying anything to the child. John Rosemond, the author of Parent Power (1981) says "For me spanking is a first resort. I seldom spank, but when I decide...I do it and that's the end of it."

The high frequency of spanking also shows up among the 4,375 parents in the National Family Violence Surveys (Gelles and Straus, 1988; Straus and Gelles, 1990). Over 90% of those who had toddlers at home used some form of corporal punishment during the preceding 12 months. The typical parent told us of about 15 instances in which they had hit the child during the previous twelve months. That is surely a minimum estimate because spanking a child is such a routine and unremarkable event that many instances are forgotten. Other studies report even more chronic reliance on corporal punishment (Newson and Newson, 1963). Daily spanking is not at all uncommon.

Myth 8

BY THE TIME A CHILD IS A TEENAGER, PARENTS HAVE STOPPED

Parents of children in their early teens are also heavy users of corporal punishment, although at that age it is more likely to be a slap on the face than on the behind. Over half of the parents of 13 year old children in our two national surveys hit the child in the previous 12 months. The percentage drops each year, but even at age 17, one out of five parents are still using corporal punishment.

Of the parents of teenagers who told us about using corporal punishment, 84% did it more than once in the previous 12 months. For boys, the average was seven times and for girls, five times. These are also minimum figures because we interviewed the mother in half the families and the father in the other half. The number of times would be greater if we had information on what the non-interviewed parent did.

Myth 9

IF PARENTS DON'T SPANK THEY WILL VERBALLY ABUSE A CHILD

The evidence from research is exactly the opposite. The National Family Violence Surveys (Straus and Gelles, 1990) included information on verbal abuse by over 4,000 parents. The parents who did the least spanking also engaged in the least verbal aggression.

It has to be pointed out that non-spanking parents are an exceptional minority. They are defying the cultural prescription which says that a good parent should spank "if necessary." The depth of their involvement with their children probably results from the same underlying characteristics that led them to reject spanking. There is a danger that if more ordinary parents are told to never spank, they might replace spanking by ignoring misbehavior or by verbal attacks. Consequently, a campaign to end spanking must also stress the importance of avoiding verbal attacks as well as physical attacks while also not ignoring misbehavior.

Myth 10

IT IS UNREALISTIC TO EXPECT PARENTS TO NEVER SPANK

It is no more (and no less) unrealistic to expect parents to never hit a child than to expect that husbands should never hit their wives, or that no one should go through a stop sign, or that supervisors should never hit employees. Despite the legal prohibition, some husbands hit their wives, just as some drivers go through stop signs and some supervisors hit an employee.

If we were to prohibit spanking, as is the law in Sweden (Deley, 1988; Haeuser, 1990), there would be parents who nevertheless continue to spank, but that is no more reason to not have such a law than the fact that some husbands

continue to hit their wives more than a century after the courts stopped recognizing the common law right of a husband to "physically chastise an errant wife" (Calvert, 1974).

What it boils down to is that a prohibition on spanking children is unrealistic only because spanking is such an accepted part of our culture. That was also true of smoking. Yet in less than a generation we made tremendous progress in eliminating smoking. We can make similar progress in eliminating spanking by showing parents that spanking is dangerous, that their children will be easier to bring up if they do not spank, and by clearly saying that a child should never, under any circumstances, be spanked.

WHY DO THESE MYTHS PERSIST?

Some of the myths are about the effectiveness of spanking and some are about the harmlessness of spanking. I will conclude by suggesting some of the reasons for the persistence of these two types of myths.

The Myth of Effectiveness

There are a number of reasons why almost everyone overestimates the effectiveness of spanking, but a central reason is what has been called "selective inattention." Selective inattention occurs when people do not pay attention to or remember the times when spanking fails to work because it contradicts what they believe to be true, i.e., that spanking always works, thus providing the "evidence" that spanking always works. Conversely, if someone knows that the parents do not spank, it is assumed that the child "must be" spoiled, wild, etc. So there is a tendency to overlook the good behavior of the child, and to attribute the inevitable instances of misbehavior to the lack of spanking, thus providing the "evidence" that parents who don't spank "when necessary" have spoiled children. These all-too-human errors in information processing create the perception that spanking is much more effective than it really is and are probably the main reason for the persistence of the effectiveness myth. The reality is that although all children misbehave, the behavior of non-spanked children, although far from perfect -- they are after all, children -- is on the average better than the behavior of children whose parents spank.

The selective inattention raises the question of why the "necessity" of spanking is such a deeply held belief. Why do most Americans have a vested interest in defending spanking? The following are some of the possible reasons.

Almost all have been spanked as children, so it is part of their normal life experience.

Even if someone is suffering from one of the harmful side effects such as depression, they do not realize that having been spanked may be one of the reasons for their depression and they can continue to believe that spanking is harmless.

Almost all parents use spanking on toddlers. Consequently, if someone who is or has been a parent accepts the idea that spanking is wrong, it implies that they have been a bad parent, at least in that respect. That is difficult to admit.

Almost everyone has been hit by their parents. Consequently, to say that this was wrong is to condemn one's own parents. That is also something that few people are comfortable doing.

These beliefs and attitudes have been crystallized as part of American culture and the American view of what a good parent owes to a child. There is abundant evidence that people tend to misperceive things that are contrary to basic tenants of their culture and beliefs (Higgins and Bargh, 1987).

Most spanking occurs when parents are frustrated and angry. In that context parents tend to get emotional release and satisfaction from spanking which is confused with effectiveness in changing the child's behavior.

There is almost always a "kernel of truth" behind myths and stereotypes. The belief in the efficacy of spanking is no exception. The truth is that some parents who do not spank also do not attempt to correct misbehavior. As explained earlier, children of these extremely permissive or neglectful parents do tend to be out-of-control. However, such parents are a minority of non-spanking parents. Their children do tend to be difficult to deal with, or sometimes even to be in the same room with, and these few instances are burned into memory.

The Myth of Harmlessness

Probably the most important reasons for the myth of harmlessness are first, because the harmful effects do not become visible right away, often not for years; and second, because only a relatively small percentage of spanked children experience obviously harmful effects.

It is now widely accepted that smoking causes lung cancer, but that fact was hotly disputed only a generation ago. The research on spanking children is about where the research on smoking was generation ago, namely the studies shows that spanking is associated with delinquency, wife beating, depression and other problems later in life, but the evidence is not conclusive. So those favoring spanking can dismiss it, just as those favoring smoking dismissed the early evidence, which was also not conclusive.

When conclusive evidence on the harmful effects of spanking does become available, it may be harder to get people to give up spanking than it was to give up smoking. Spanking may be more firmly entrenched because almost everyone was spanked or is a spanker, but not everyone was a smoker.

Another reason spanking will be hard to eliminate is because the chance of falling victim to one of the harmful effects of spanking is much lower than the

risk of experiencing the harmful effects of smoking. For example, Figure 4 shows that spanked children are about four times more likely to be highly aggressive and Figure 1 shows that frequently spanked children are about two and a half times more likely to hit their spouse later in life. The effects of smoking are much greater. A high rate of smoking tends to increase the chances of lung cancer by 34 times, even though two thirds of very heavy smokers do not die of a smoking related disease (Mattson et al., 1987).

Since spanking is associated with a two to four times greater rate of harmful behavior, whereas smoking increases the lung cancer rate by 34 times, it can be argued that smoking is a much more serious problem, However, it can also be argued that spanking is the more serious problem because almost all parents spank, and spanking therefore puts more people at risk of harm.

There is no need to decide if spanking is worse than smoking. Both are harmful, both need to be eliminated, and both can be eliminated. In the case of spanking, even though it may increase the probability of harm "only" three or four times, that is three or four times too many because it is an unnecessary risk; especially since children are more likely to be well behaved without spanking.

CULTURAL RIGHTS AND FAMILY PRIVACY

If it is true that research on spanking is now about where the research on smoking was a generation ago, it can be argued that a concerted effort to end spanking amounts to imposing the unproven values of one segment of society on others (Larzelere, 1993). Respect for minority rights is an extremely important principle. However, valid and important principles often contradict other valid and important principles, for example, "A stitch in time saves nine," and "Haste makes waste." Many things need to be considered when choosing which applies in a given situation. The conflicting principle in this instance is that it is wrong to treat children in ways that might threaten their physical and mental health when there are equally effective methods that do not pose this risk. Although the evidence is not all in, there is enough to seek an accommodation between our commitment to individual freedom and our commitment to the well being of children and of society. In Sweden, for example, there is no penalty for spanking. Instead, the law assumes that when parents spank, it is because they are having trouble controlling a child. The Swedes try to help such parents achieve the kind of control that children need and therefore make spanking unnecessary. This does not impose on peoples values because even parents who approve of spanking because of their religious beliefs or ethnic culture, prefer that it never be necessary.

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FIG.1 ASSAULTS ON SPOUSE BY AMOUNT OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT AS A CHILD

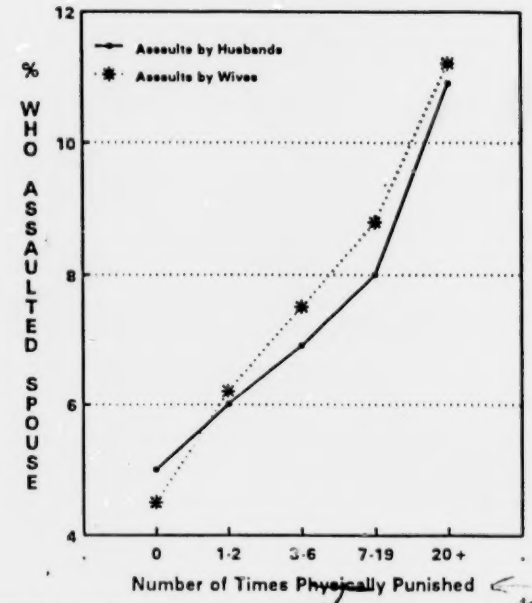

FIG 2. DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS BY CORPORAL PUNISHMENT BY MOTHER

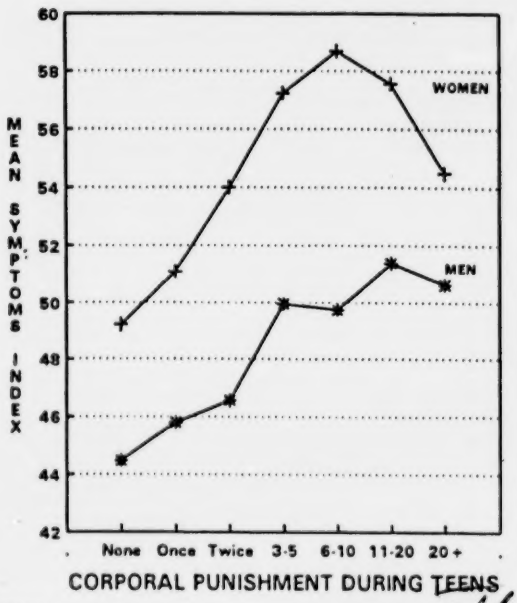

Fig 3. CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND CHILD AGGRESSION, CONTROLLING FOR IGNORING CHILD'S AGGRESSION

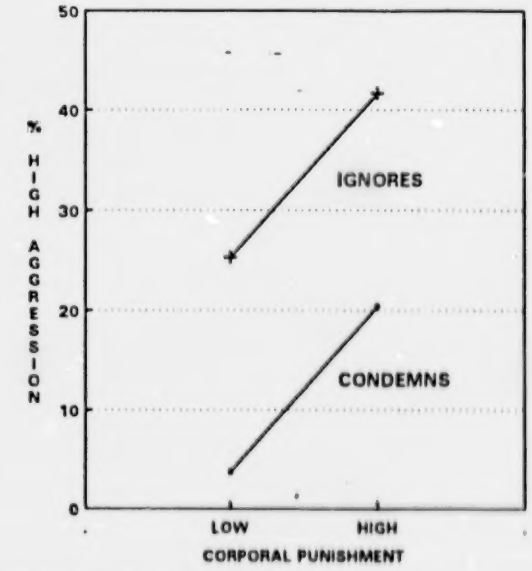

Fig 4. CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONSCIENCE